THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT IN KANCHIPURAM

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The evolution of the technique of Satyagraha in the long drawn political struggle launched by Mahatma Gandhi and his numerous followers against the British India was a romantic history. Earlier Gandhi launched a successful Satyagraha in South Africa where he lived and fought for the basic rights of emigrant Indians. In India Gandhi modified his techniques taking into account the local situations and the socio - economic conditions of the people. In fact the word Satyagraha had romantic origin in the life of Gandhi.

By 1928, the struggle against British imperialism entered a new phase. The political climate in the Country was conductive for launching the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Lahore session of the Congress, presided by Jawaharlal Nehru, declared complete independence for India as its goal. The national leader lost hope in the Labour Government in London that any reasonable response would be made to the Indian demand. As decided at the Lahore session of the Congress Gandhi declared 26th January 1930 as Independence Day. Following this, Gandhi published his eleven point demand which had an appeal for every section of the people. But the Viceroy made no response to Gandhi's ultimatum. In such a condition Gandhi announced his decision to open his campaign by opposing the Salt Act. He decided to disobey the Salt Act for it was the most ubiquitous and the most iniquitous of all laws in India. By this Act the poor peasants suffered much. Hence Gandhi declared the Civil Disobedience. On 12 March he gave a notice to Viceroy declaring the programme of the historic Dandhi March. And this opened yet another chapter in India's fight for Independence.

Dandi March

Dandi was a place situated on the seacoast, about 200 miles from Ahmedabad from where his journey commenced. Gandhi took with him 79 of his selected followers, and the Programme was that after covering this distance on foot and reaching the seacoast, he would break the Salt Law, which made it a legal offence to prepare salt even from the salt water. The salt tax had been doubled in 1923, and since this tax fell most heavily on the common man, the Salt Law was taken up to be broken first. The March Commenced on 12 March. At every place the Villages thronged around the Satyagrahis and accorded them a cheerful and enthusiastic reception. Press resounded with the stories for full 24 days during which the March was continued. When Mahatma Gandhi reached Dandi by April 5, the whole nation reverberated with a rare wave of enthusiasm and patriotism. After a day of prayers and fasting, on 6 April the Civil Disobedience started when the Mahatma Gandhi appropriated a piece of salt which lay on the beach. Immediately after Gandhi issued a statement: "This war against the Salt Tax should be continued during the National week that is, up to the 13th April. Those who are not engaged in this sacred work should themselves to vigorous propaganda for the boycott of foreign cloth and the use of Khaddar.

The Civil Disobedience included violation of Salt Law, abstention from Government services and educational institutions, picketing of liquor shops, opium dens and foreign cloth-dealer's shops and non-payment of taxes. Despite all the Precautions made by the Government, the Movement spread like wildfire and reached almost the nook and corner of the country. Many leading women and Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Jawarlal Nehru were arrested. Not less than 60,000 persons were put into prison. Mahatma Gandhi was arrested on May 5, 1930 before he could offer Satyagraha and make Salt at the Government depot at Dharsana, 150 miles from Bombay.

Immediately following the arrest of Gandhi order was issued for the imposition of Section 144 in the City of Madras and rural centres prohibiting the holding of meetings and organizing processions against the arrest of Gandhi. S. Satyamurthi and Rajagopalachari were arrested on 9th January 1932 and the Congress house was seized under section 3 of the unlawful Association ordinance. In Chengalput district, particularly in Kanchipuram protest meetings and processions were organized by the followers of Mahatma Gandhi, defying the imposition of section 144. At Kanchipuram Chackaral alias Rajarathina Mudaliar who served as a Kanchipuram Municipal Councillor for a long time, took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement and was arrested and sentenced to one year under section 13(a) of S.P. Act of 1941, he was kept in Vellore Central Jail.10 D. Dhanapal of Kanchipuram took part in Civil Disobedience Movement in 1932 was arrested and sentenced to three months under section 18 clause of Act 23 of 1931. He was kept in Central Jail, Madras.

Kanchipuram had number of Gandhij's and his trusted lieutenant Rajagopalachari's followers, they participated vigorously in the Salt Satyagraha and in Civil Disobedience Movement. More than 13 volunteers took part in these movements. Vaidyanatha Iyer of Kanchipuram actively participated in the Salt Sayagraha in 1930. He was arrested and sentenced to six months under Section 143. I.P.C. and kept in Alipuram Jail.

T.K. Krishnasamy of Kanchipuram was another freedom fighters who took part in Civil Disobedience Movement actively who was arrested by the British Government and sentenced to seven months under section 436 I.P.C. and kept in Alipuram Jail.

Dr. Srinivasan, a Swarajist Municipal Councillor along with a few volunteers from outside who had attended a meeting on 10 June 1930 and the other on the next day at Javalikadai Choultry attended. Another meeting was notified for 12. Hence an order under section 144 Cr. P.C. was served on four persons. Two of them, Vedantham and Narasimha Murthi Subsequently disobeyed the order. They were eventually convicted and sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment each on23 June. Reserve Police were moved to the place. The volunteers who have made Kanchipuram their temporary head-quarters were removed from there. On 1st and 5th July some people held a meeting which 200 people attended. Dr. Srinivasan spoke about Khaddar boycott etc., Two others followed him. They were charge-sheeted immediately and convicted the next day. On 11 August Sitharama Sarma of Kanchipuram was convicted under section 117 I.P.C. and 26 N.F.A and sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. He preferred an appeal to the sessions Judge and got his conviction reduced to two months.

Annamalai Mudaliar of Kanchipuram took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1932, was arrested and sentenced to one year under section 17(1) of the criminal law Amendment Act. He remained in the Vellore Jail for one year. Another freedom fighter of Kanchipuram Chinnasami Mudaliar also took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement who was arrested by the Madras Government and sentenced to six months under section 143 and 188 I.P.C. in 1931 and kept in Alipuram Jail. P.Rathnavelu Mudaliar, S.Varadaraja Mudaliar, Balasundara Naicker, L.Radasami Naicker of Kanchipuram were participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement and sentenced for six months in Central Jail, Madras and in Vellore Jail. Janakiram Naidu, Narasimhalu Chettiar, Raguraman, V.Raghunatha Rao of Kanchipuram took part in Foreign Cloth boycott and Toddy Shop picketing at Kanchipuram and was arrested and sentenced to six months under section 143 and 188 I.P.C., kept in Vellore and Bellary Central Jails.

On July 14, 1942, the Congress Working Committee at Wardha, passed a long resolution, generally referred as the 'Quit India' Resolution. It renewed the demand that British rule in India must end immediately and reiterated the interest of India, but also for the safety of the world and for the ending of Nazism, Facism, Militarism and other forms of imperialism and the aggression of one nation over another.

The Quit India Movement was a National Movement. It was not a class movement. It cut across the barriers of caste, creed, race or colour. It started as a Congress Movement, but ended as a movement by the people. The circumstances which led to the launching of the Quit India Movement were as follows: The Quit India Movement was born out of the deep frustration caused by the failure of the Cripps Mission. The Cripps Mission failed because it was intended to fail. Churchill was interested more in satisfying America than in solving Indian Problem. In fact Churchill is said to have "danced around the Cabinet room" at the failure of the Cripps Mission. Anyway,the Cripps Mission aroused high hopes in India as its failure caused deep disappointment. The leaders of freedom struggle were frustrated and became furious because the British Government wanted India to remain "Supine spectators in an hour of decision".

After the failure of Cripps Mission the people of India expected that the British Government would make yet another offer more acceptable to Indians. But the Secretary of the State for India, Amery insisted that "the initiative must come from Indians. We can hardly be expected, after this rejection, to go chasing them again or to send out yet another emissary". This only betrayed the uncompromising and obdurate attitude of the British Government. Moreover, the British Government was obstinately adamant in its stand that India was not one and so it did not know whom to transfer power. Congress leaders were exasperated at this stand.

The Congress efforts to reorganize India for an effective fight against the Japanese menace received a severe jolt and the general mass of people fell into a full dependency, which could prove utterly harmful to the country. In the meanwhile the Japanese danger to India had increased and their attack on Bengal seemed imminent. Gandhi somehow developed the belief that if the British immediately left India there would be no reason left for Japan to attack the country. It was therefore proposed that a 'Quit India' resolution should immediately be passed by the Congress. The demand was only for an immediate transfer of power to India failing which the Congress would launch a Non-violent movement against the British. Gandhi perhaps believed that with Japan knocking at the very doors of India, the British instead of taking any drastic steps against the movement would rather try to come to terms with the Congress.

Within a short time after the arrest of the Congress leaders, the situation in the country was brought to normal. The British Government blamed that the 'Quit India' resolution and some utterances of Gandhi were responsible for violence. The Government also insisted that unless the 'Quit-India' resolution was withdrawn, it could not release Gandhiji. Gandhi accepted the responsibility for what happened and undertook a fast for twenty-one days. The Government struck hard to crush the revolt.

On 9th August 1942 more than twenty Congressmen were arrested in Bombay and were taken to unknown destination. At Bombay, before his arrest Gandhiji had left a written message with his wife who in turn revealed the message to Satyamurthi. He at once called a meeting of all the remaining members of All India Congress Committee numbering about 70. Satyamurthi read the message of Gandhiji to the members present and this was cyclostyled under his guidance. It was later handed over to the members of the various provinces who were present there. After spending a day 9th August for arranging the dispatch of cyclostyled message of Gandhiji, Satyamurthi left for Madras by train on 10th August 1942. K.Kamaraj, Bhaktavachalam, Muthuranga Mudaliar and other also traveled in the same train to Madras. The British

Government already listed the Congress leaders to be arrested for being present when the Quit India resolution was passed in the Bombay meeting. Police were stationed in almost all the railway stations. Kamaraj the President of TamilNadu Congress Committee, as per the instruction by Gandhiji, Kamaraj decided to go underground to organize the Campaign in TamilNadu. The TamilNadu Congress leaders got down at Madras Central Railway station. Kamaraj had got down through the back door at Arakkonam, in the guise of a Muslim and went to Ranipet. When Muthuranga Mudaliar, Bhaktavachalam and others arrived the Central Railway Station, Madras they were arrested and taken into custody. Satyamurthi was arrested at Arakkonam junction on 11th August 1942 and was taken to Vellore jail and was detained there under the Defence of India Rule.

One after another, Congress Committee was declared illegal and the TamilNadu Congress stalwarts were put behind the bar. All meetings and processions were banned. Search was made in TamilNadu Congress Committee office and its properties including important documents were confiscated. Its fund was brought under the control of the Government and its office was sealed. Other Congress Committee too met with the same fate. After the arrest of the TamilNadu Congress Leaders, the only leader who met the Congress workers in Tamil districts secretly for asking them to organize the Movement was Kamaraj, the President of TamilNadu Congress Committee. But he was also detained within few days. Following this, the workers and the people of TamilNadu were left without a leader and their resentment resulted in violence in many places. It led to the dislocation of communications in different places. Railway and police stations were set on fire. Normal life in the important cities including Madras was completely paralyzed. Students, workers, shopkeepers and even house-wives marched through slogans. The British adopted repressive and in human measures to suppress the mass Movement. Police firing at many places in TamilNadu took place and many patriots were killed.

In South Arcot, the students of Annamalai University played a leading role and formed "Annamalai University Organisation", to guide the students in carrying out the movement. It collected four annas as subscription like that of the congress membership for, and the receipt bore the imprint 'Freedom, peace and Progress. In North Arcot district and Madras city, the students took up the Movement in their hands. Above all, Chengalpattu district appeared to have served as one of the main centres of distribution of Congress literature, pamphlets and leaflets for the Tamil districts. Many Congressmen and sympathizers all over the district were arrested for being in possession of leaflets and pamphlets advocating Congress cause. On 12th September, 1942, one Venkatakrishnaswamy was arrested for pasting leaflets and Kanchipuram Subramania Mudaliar was arrested for the same.

The Chenglapattu District Board and the Damal Panchayat Board were superseded for six months for passing resolutions condemning the Governments repressive policy and for ordering to close all offices and institutions under their control. After December 1942, the intensity in the August Movement gradually started losing. But, this did not mean that the Movement came to an end. Only the storming outbreak of masses came to a standstill. The congressmen who escaped from arrest and went underground carried on the Movement according to the secret programme of the congress. In this way, the movement continued, losing its Non-violent character, till the release of Gandhiji on 6th May, 1944.

In January, 1943, the 'shadow All India Congress Committee' issued secret instruction to the Congressmen for the observation of Independence Day on 26th January 1943. These instructions provide for mass meetings, processions and public readings of a revised Independence pledge with a view to stimulate the flagging of rebellion. All the District Magistrates were warned not to relax their vigilance. Students in Thirunelveli, Tanjore, South Arcot districts involved in the Congress activities were either detained or given punishment or both. It must be remembered that hoisting of Congress flags formed part of the activities of the Quit India Movement. In Madras City, students staged a number of demonstrations and picketed in batches the Secretariat and the Chief Presidency Magistrate's Court. Many Municipal Councils in various district passed resolutions praying for the unconditional release of Gandhiji. The Hindu Maha Sabha held a meeting in Madras, also pleading for Gandhiji's release though disapproving of his fast. Though, the Muslim league remained neutral, Mr.Alla Pitchai, the secretary of the local Muslim league in Madras had advocated Gandhiji's release. But, there was no violence throughout the Tamil districts. Ending of Gandhiji's 21 days fast was celebrated by arranging prayer meetings and feeding the poor freely. The Congressmen and supporters who had fasted in sympathy with Gandhiji also broke their fast.

Gandhiji announced that the August resolution could not be withdrawn. Mrs. Laksmipathi and C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar arranged for meetings. They also expressed their unreserved loyalty to Gandhiji's leadership. A branch of the 'All - India Students Congress' which was recently formed in Nagpur had been formed in TamilNadu. Most of the organizers were the leaders of the National Students Organization. The National Students Organization led by Swaminathan organized a meeting in which K.Diraviyam, Sub-Editor of Dinamani, spoke acclaiming the August resolution as being responsible for the political awareness of the country, but at the same time affirming faith in Gandhiji's leadership and his proposals.64 However, the Quit India Movement died gently when Gandhiji was released.

The Quit India Movement was carried even to the close of December 1944 in a mild form in the Tamil districts. Jai Prakash Narayan and Aruna Asaf Ali were the two important leaders who carried the Movement in the All India level. She visited Madras, and supplied explosives to the Congressmen. Under her leadership, along with Arunachalam and Ramaratnam, the Ennore bridge and the All India Radio in Madras were bombed.65 This shows that the Congressmen in TamilNadu did not lack in spirit to carry the Quit India Movement even to the close of 1944.

Kanchipuram city is described as one of the seven important religious cities of India. It was a seat of education, of religion and philosophy and of art. Kanchipuram took an active part in the country's Freedom Movement. It also became the venue of a Congress Conference in the year 1925. When Gandhiji instructed his followers just before his arrest "Let every Non-violent soldier of freedom write out the slogan 'do or die' on a piece of paper or cloth and stick it on his clothes, so that

in case he died in the course of offering Satyagraha, it might be distinguished by this sign from other elements who do not subscribe to non-violence. During the Quit India Movement, Kanchipuram also played a key role. TamilNadu Congress Committee organized several meetings and conferences all over the Tamil districts.

C.N.Muthuranga Mudaliar of Kanchipuram actively participated in the Freedom Movement Since 1917. He took part almost all the programmes organized by TamilNadu Congress Committee at Kanchipuram. He also took part in Individual Satyagraha Movement in 1941. During 1942 August Movement he was arrested and kept in Vellore, Madras and Amroati Jail as detenu and released in June 1943. He also served for sometimes as the President of the Madras Mahajana Sabha, elected as a member of Madras Legislative Council as a Swarajist Candidate and resigned. He was unanimously elected the President of the 39th TamilNadu political Conference held at Batlagundu.

Apart from the above people following freedom fighters of Kanchipuram participated in the Quit India Movement, 1942. V.M.Narayanasamy Mudaliar, A.Natesa Mudaliar, T.Raju Mudaliar, Saminatha Mudaliar, Saravana Mudaliar, N.R.Muniswamy, N.Devarajulu Naidu, A.Kuppusami Naidu, N.G.Parthasarathy Naidu, Narashimhan, Pachaiyappan, S.Parthasarathy, P.M.Rajamanickam, Abbey Raj Sowcar, P.S.Srinivasan, N.Subramaniam, Thulasinga Perumal, the living freedom fighter of Kanchipuram, and T.A.Venkatachariar were the important personalities, who participated in the Quit India Movement. Inspite of British repression, they organized meetings, distributed pamphlets and leaflets of the Congress party to continue the Movement secretly in Kanchipuram. Most of them were severely punished and remained in Alipuram, Vellore, Madras, Thanjavur, Amroati Jails.

The death of Kasturibai Gandhi had its reflection in the mofussil areas of TamilNadu. Particularly in Kanchipuram schools and Colleges were closed and hartal was observed in many places. The Congressmen of Kanchipuram even acted independently. Individual Congress activists, who had gone underground also, prepared pamphlets and leaflets of their own and distributed them secretly. They use to write these pamphlets and leaflets mainly during the night times. Leaflets urging non-payment of taxes were also noticed in Kanchipuram city. It must be remembered that hoisting of Congress flags formed part of the activities of the Quit India Movement. Some of them were also involved in violent activities, the telephone wires were cut, Government offices were set to fire etc., Students organized strikes, staged demonstrations and observed fast for several days. At Kanchipuram the ending of Gandhiji's 21 days fast was celebrated by arranging prayer meetings and feeding the poor freely. At the end of July, 1943, the shadow All India Congress Committee sent a circular, giving instructions to underground Congress organizations to hold meetings, demonstrations and processions on the first anniversary of the August Movement. In Kanchipuram the students and the Congressmen made an attempt to observe hartal by distributing leaflets and asking the shop-keepers to close their shops, but the organizers were arrested. This shows that the people of Kanchipuram, the students and the Congressmen did not lack in spirit to carry the Quit India Movement even to the close of 1944.

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